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MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE™

Battle Under Snake Mountain™

Written by John Braden
Illustrated by Pablo and Judith Marcos

Hi, everybody. This is your Masters of the Universe Read-Along Book. Every time you hear the chime...it means it's time to turn the page in your storybook. Now, if you are ready, we will start the story, "Battle Under Snake Mountain." Don't forget to turn the page every time you hear the chime. Okay, here we go!

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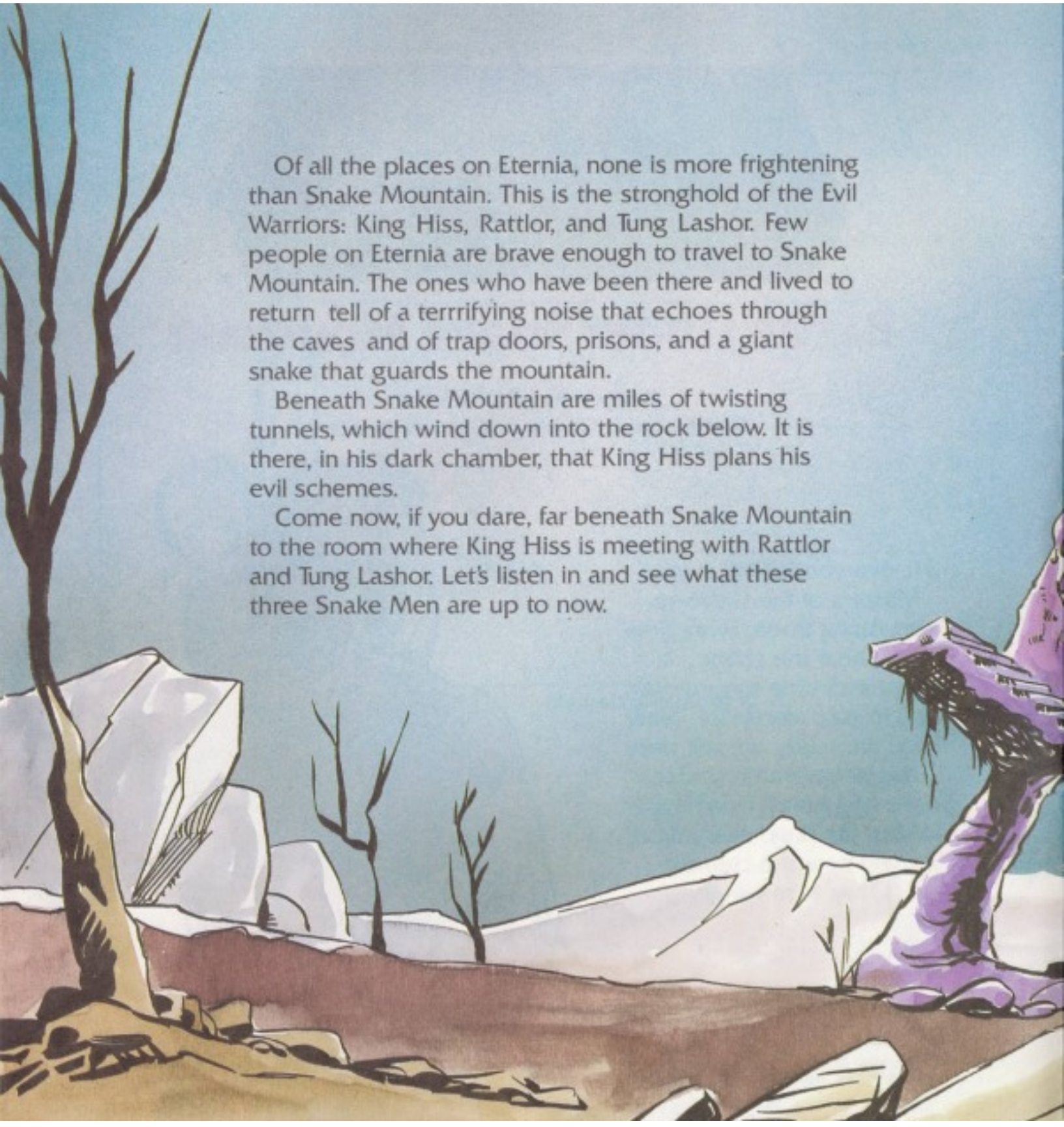


Of all the places on Eternia, none is more frightening than Snake Mountain. This is the stronghold of the Evil Warriors: King Hiss, Rattlor, and Tung Lashor. Few people on Eternia are brave enough to travel to Snake Mountain. The ones who have been there and lived to return tell of a terrrifying noise that echoes through the caves and of trap doors, prisons, and a giant snake that guards the mountain.

Beneath Snake Mountain are miles of twisting tunnels, which wind down into the rock below. It is there, in his dark chamber, that King Hiss plans his evil schemes.

Come now, if you dare, far beneath Snake Mountain to the room where King Hiss is meeting with Rattlor and Tung Lashor. Let's listen in and see what these three Snake Men are up to now.

"Rattlor! Tung Lashor! Come forward out of the shadows!" ordered King Hiss, seated on his throne. "I feel better when you are both within my sight."

King Hiss's red eyes gleamed and his muscular green body rippled in the half-light of the torches. He was in his human form, but this was a disguise. He could change at will into a writhing mass of yellow serpents.

Tung Lashor and Rattlor stepped forward. Rattlor's quick-strike head was in its resting position now. He wouldn't dare extend it in the presence of King Hiss. His long tail dragged behind him and twitched from left to right, as it always did when he was nervous. Beside Rattlor stood Tung Lashor. His muscular purple and black body glistened, and his long green tongue flicked in and out of his mouth.

Together, the two evil Snake Men walked slowly forward toward King Hiss's throne. "You sent for us, great king?" spoke the two Snake Men together.

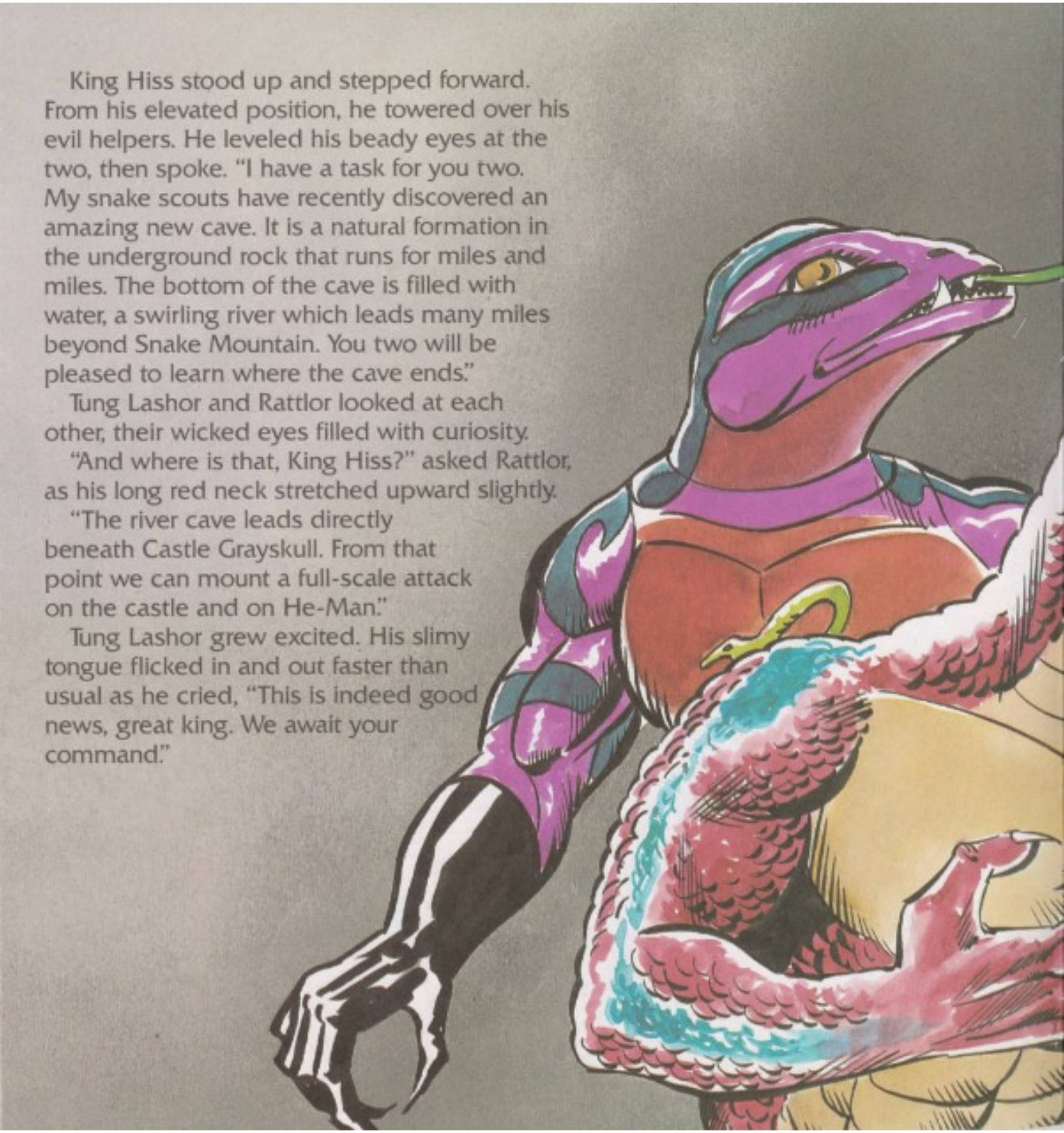
King Hiss stood up and stepped forward. From his elevated position, he towered over his evil helpers. He leveled his beady eyes at the two, then spoke. "I have a task for you two. My snake scouts have recently discovered an amazing new cave. It is a natural formation in the underground rock that runs for miles and miles. The bottom of the cave is filled with water, a swirling river which leads many miles beyond Snake Mountain. You two will be pleased to learn where the cave ends."

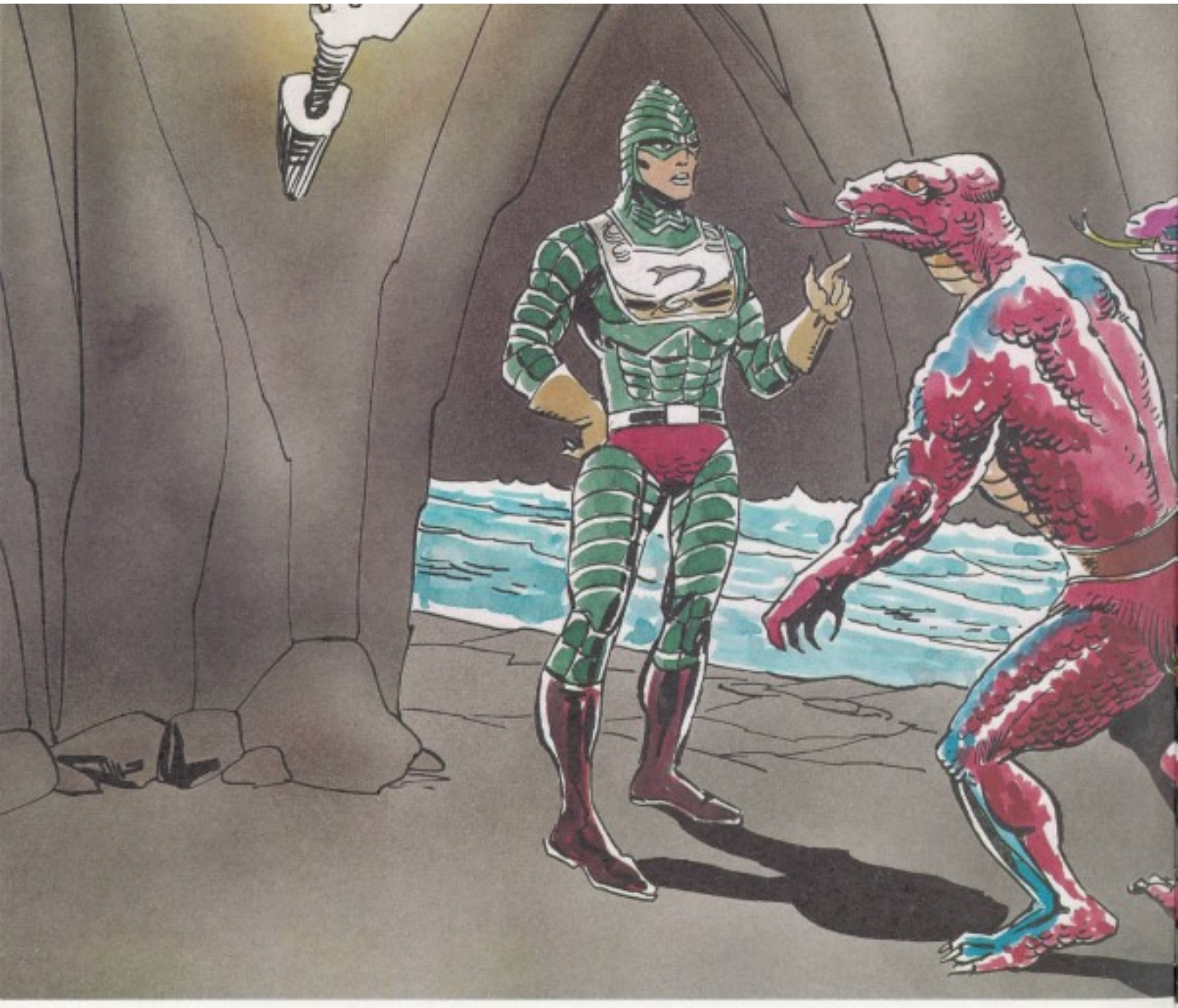
Tung Lashor and Rattlor looked at each other, their wicked eyes filled with curiosity.

"And where is that, King Hiss?" asked Rattlor, as his long red neck stretched upward slightly.

"The river cave leads directly beneath Castle Grayskull. From that point we can mount a full-scale attack on the castle and on He-Man."

Tung Lashor grew excited. His slimy tongue flicked in and out faster than usual as he cried, "This is indeed good news, great king. We await your command."

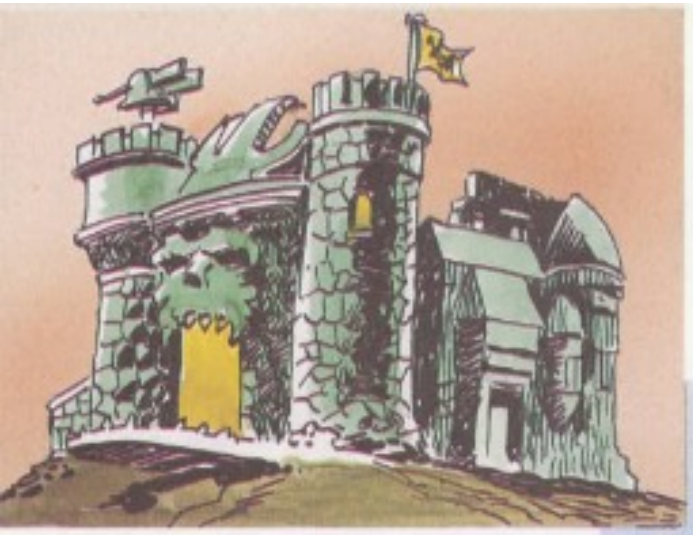




King Hiss knew exactly what he wanted his two evil helpers to do. He led them to the cave and ordered, "Take this barge and sail the river to its end. Study the caves carefully, then return and tell me the best way to attack the castle. When you return, the three of us, plus an army of Snake Men, will sail back to Castle Grayskull. Then we can tunnel up through the soil and into the castle from beneath. He-Man will be caught off guard, and we will capture him. Then

Castle Grayskull and all the knowledge it holds will be in our possession. He-Man may have stopped us in the past, but this time we will win!"

Smiling wickedly, Tung Lashor and Rattlor bowed low before King Hiss, then turned and slithered toward the flat-bottomed barge tied up nearby. They knew that the strong current in the river would carry them to their secret spot beneath Castle Grayskull.



The hour was late, and He-Man was tired after a long and troubling day. No sooner was in bed than he was sound asleep.

Meanwhile, inside Castle Grayskull, He-Man, the most powerful man in the Universe, paced back and forth across the stone floor. He had been worried all day, but didn't know why. Now he wondered aloud, "I don't know what's the matter with me. For the past day or so, something's been bothering me...something I can't put my finger on. Over the last few years, though, I've learned to trust my instincts. When I'm in a mood like this, it usually means that something evil is afoot on Eternia."

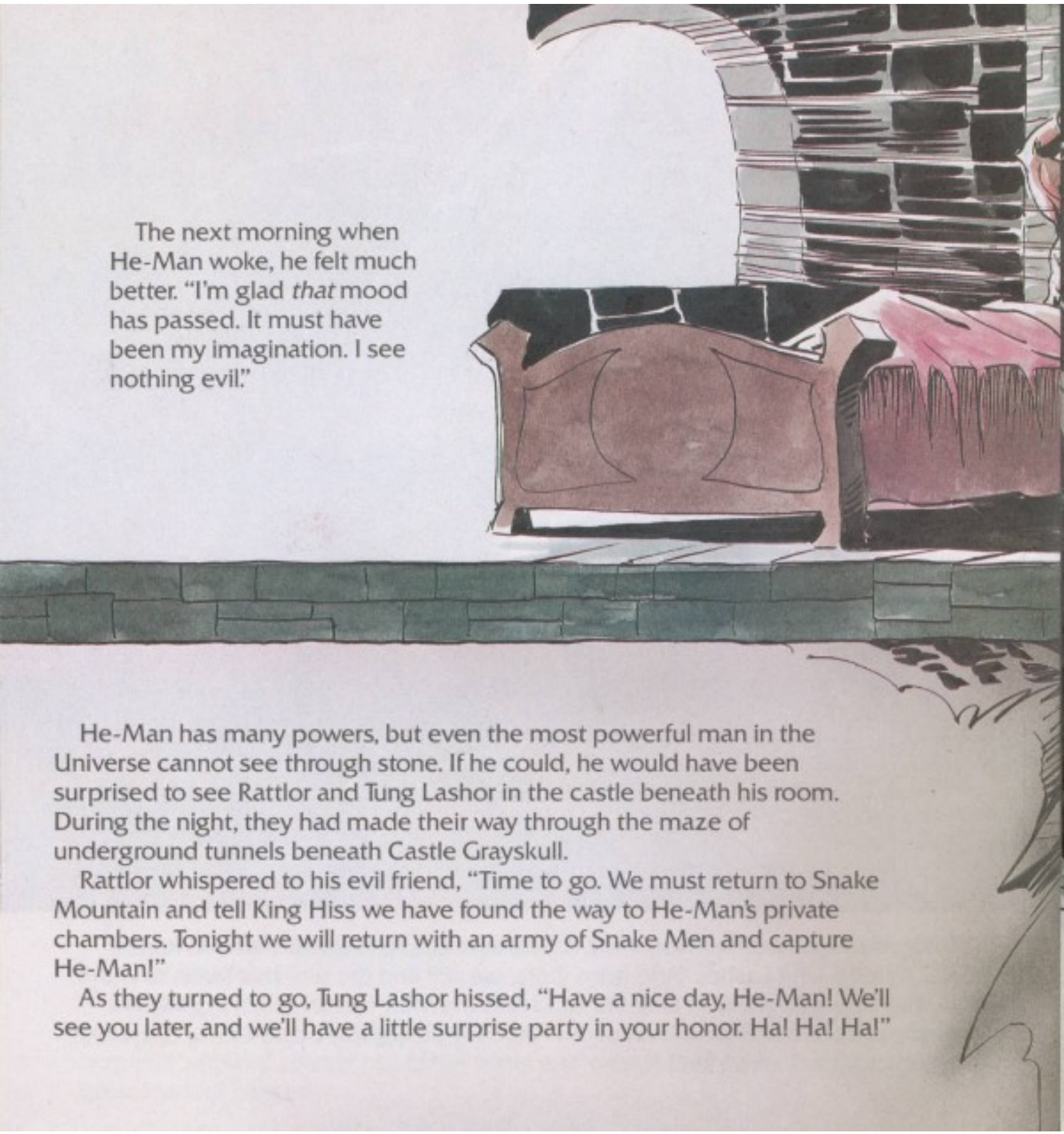
While He-Man slept, the evil Snake Men on board the barge drifted ever closer to Castle Grayskull. Rattlor and Tung Lashor stood on the deck, their legs astride, as the giant boat floated through the dark underground cave.

"How wide the river is now!" hissed Rattlor as he piloted the barge through a series of small rapids.

Standing at the front of the barge, Tung Lashor held a torch high. Its red glow cast twisting shadows on the jagged rocks which lined the cave. Smaller snakes and serpents whisked silently out of the water and onto the slimy rocks as their two great leaders passed.

"Before dawn wakes He-Man, we will be under Castle Grayskull," hissed Rattlor.

"Yes," agreed Tung Lashor. "And from there, we will find the way that leads to the castle. Then we will return to King Hiss and tell him what we have learned. He will be most pleased. When we all return, He-Man will be captured and Castle Grayskull will belong to the Snake Men."



The next morning when He-Man woke, he felt much better. "I'm glad *that* mood has passed. It must have been my imagination. I see nothing evil."

He-Man has many powers, but even the most powerful man in the Universe cannot see through stone. If he could, he would have been surprised to see Rattlor and Tung Lashor in the castle beneath his room. During the night, they had made their way through the maze of underground tunnels beneath Castle Grayskull.

Rattlor whispered to his evil friend, "Time to go. We must return to Snake Mountain and tell King Hiss we have found the way to He-Man's private chambers. Tonight we will return with an army of Snake Men and capture He-Man!"

As they turned to go, Tung Lashor hissed, "Have a nice day, He-Man! We'll see you later, and we'll have a little surprise party in your honor. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

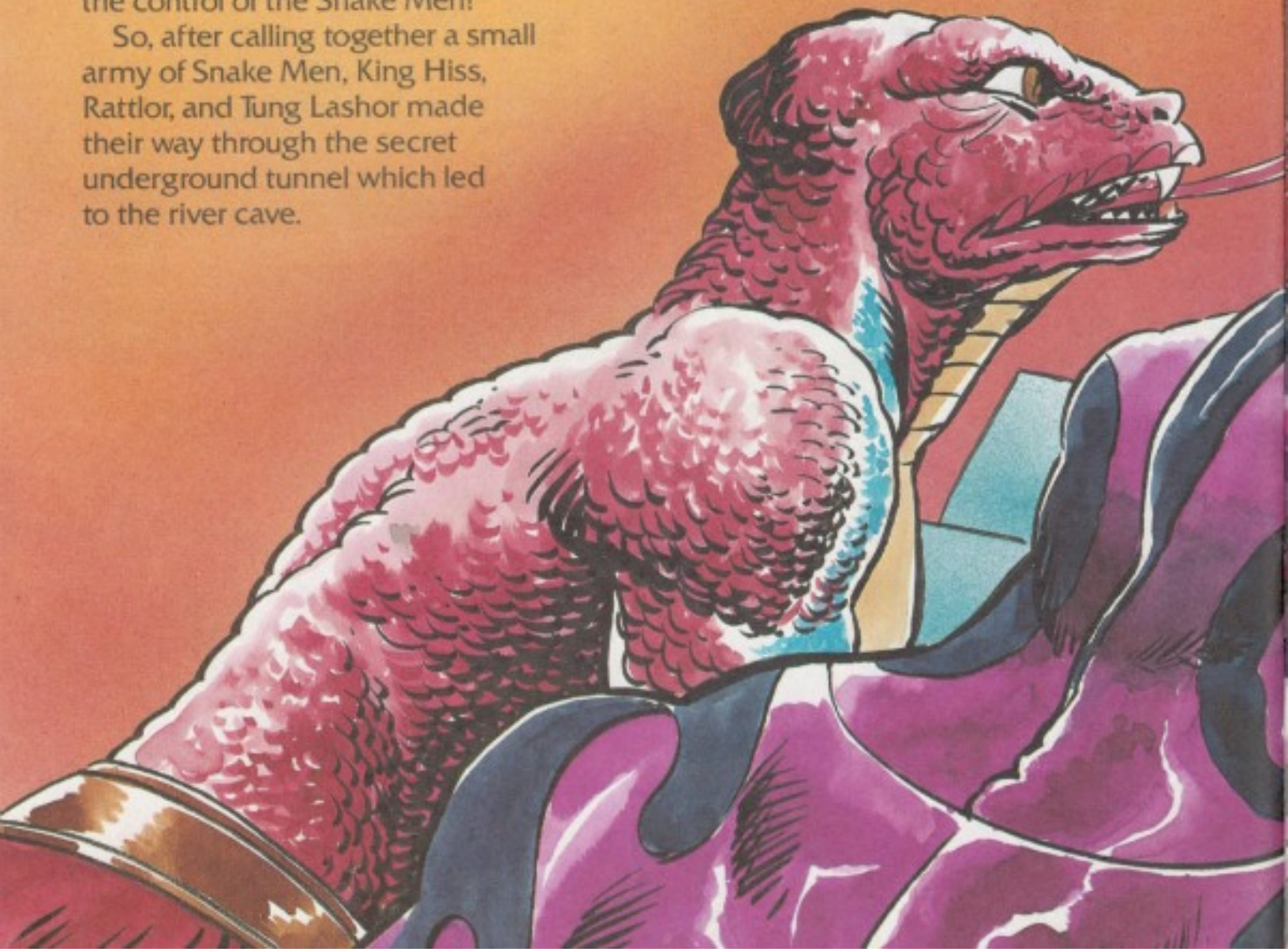
Once Rattlor and Tung Lashor were back at Snake Mountain, they told King Hiss what they had learned.

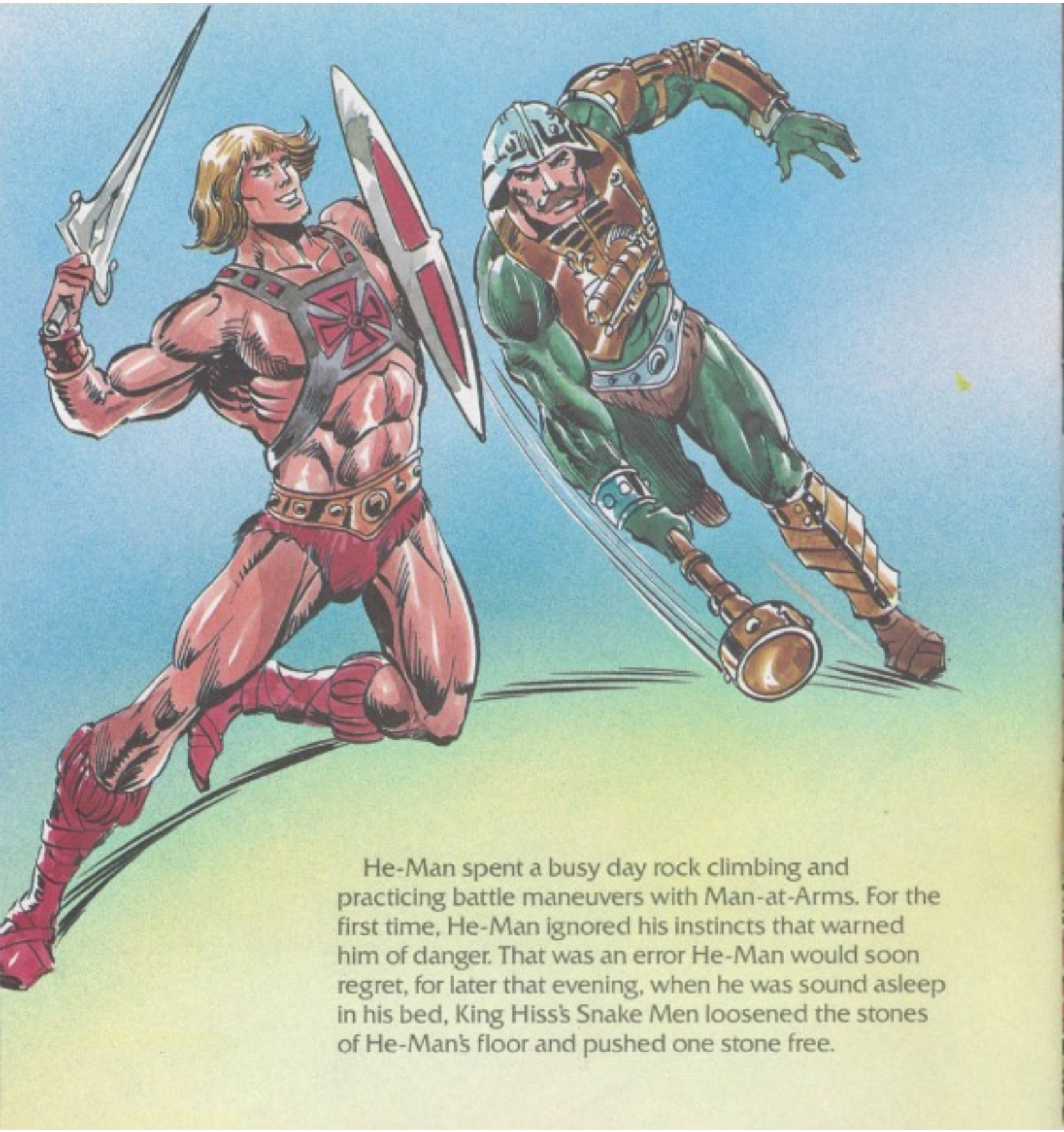
The evil king of the Snake Men seemed pleased. "You have done well, very well indeed. And He-Man knows nothing of your digging under his room? Are you certain of that?"

"The all-powerful He-Man will be totally surprised by the little visit we have planned," answered Rattlor. "I can assure you of this!"

"Splended!" hissed the king. "What are we waiting for? To the barge! By this time tomorrow, He-Man will be my prisoner and Castle Grayskull will be under the control of the Snake Men!"

So, after calling together a small army of Snake Men, King Hiss, Rattlor, and Tung Lashor made their way through the secret underground tunnel which led to the river cave.

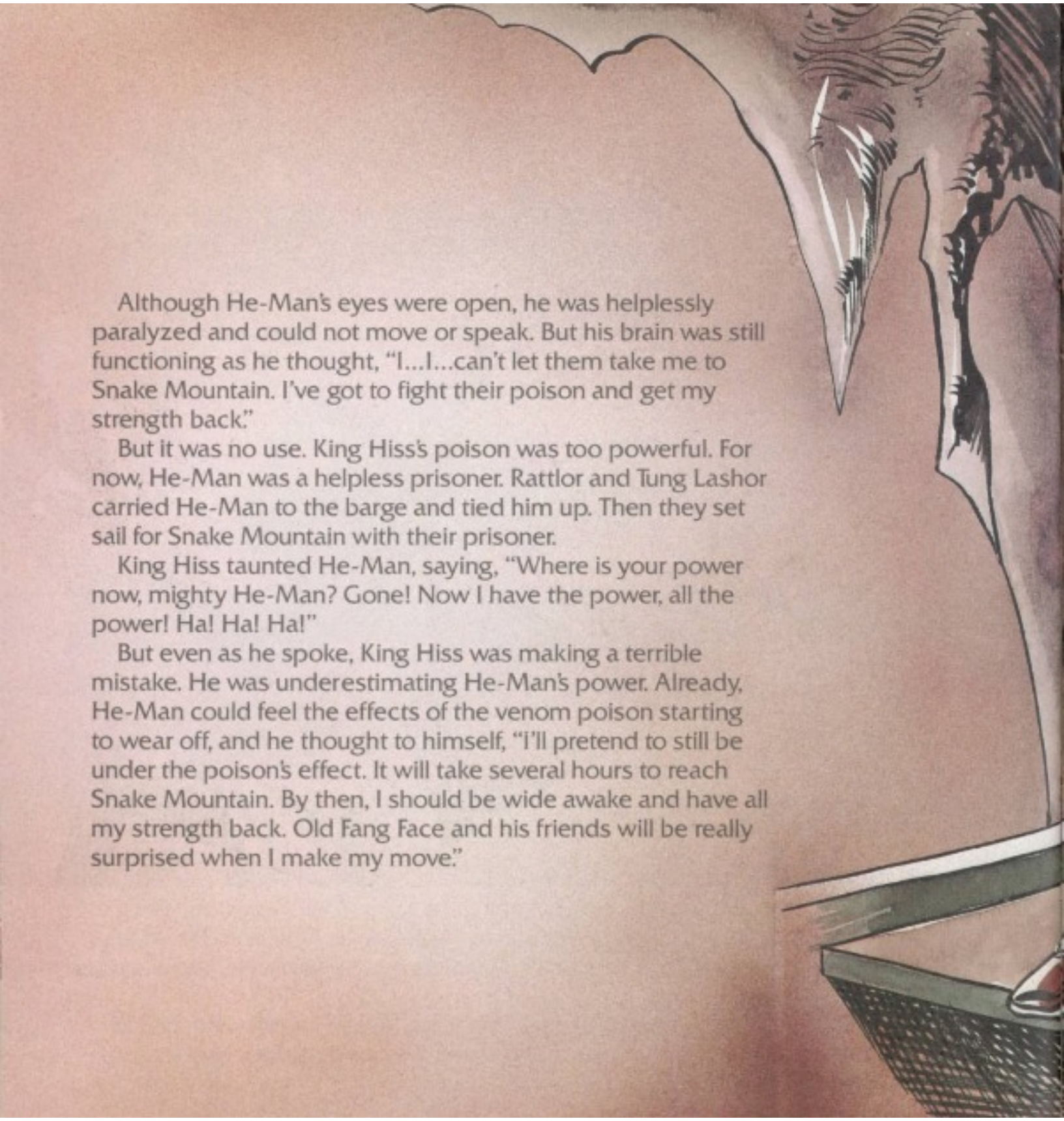




He-Man spent a busy day rock climbing and practicing battle maneuvers with Man-at-Arms. For the first time, He-Man ignored his instincts that warned him of danger. That was an error He-Man would soon regret, for later that evening, when he was sound asleep in his bed, King Hiss's Snake Men loosened the stones of He-Man's floor and pushed one stone free.

Silently King Hiss, Rattlor, and Tung Lashor crept to He-Man's bedside. Using a special venom poison, King Hiss rubbed a few drops of the fluid onto He-Man's hand. Soon the most powerful man in the Universe was helpless. He was in a deep trance and paralyzed.

"Carry He-Man to the barge!" shouted King Hiss. "We will return with him to Snake Mountain. Once I have him in chains there, we can begin our conquest of Castle Grayskull!"

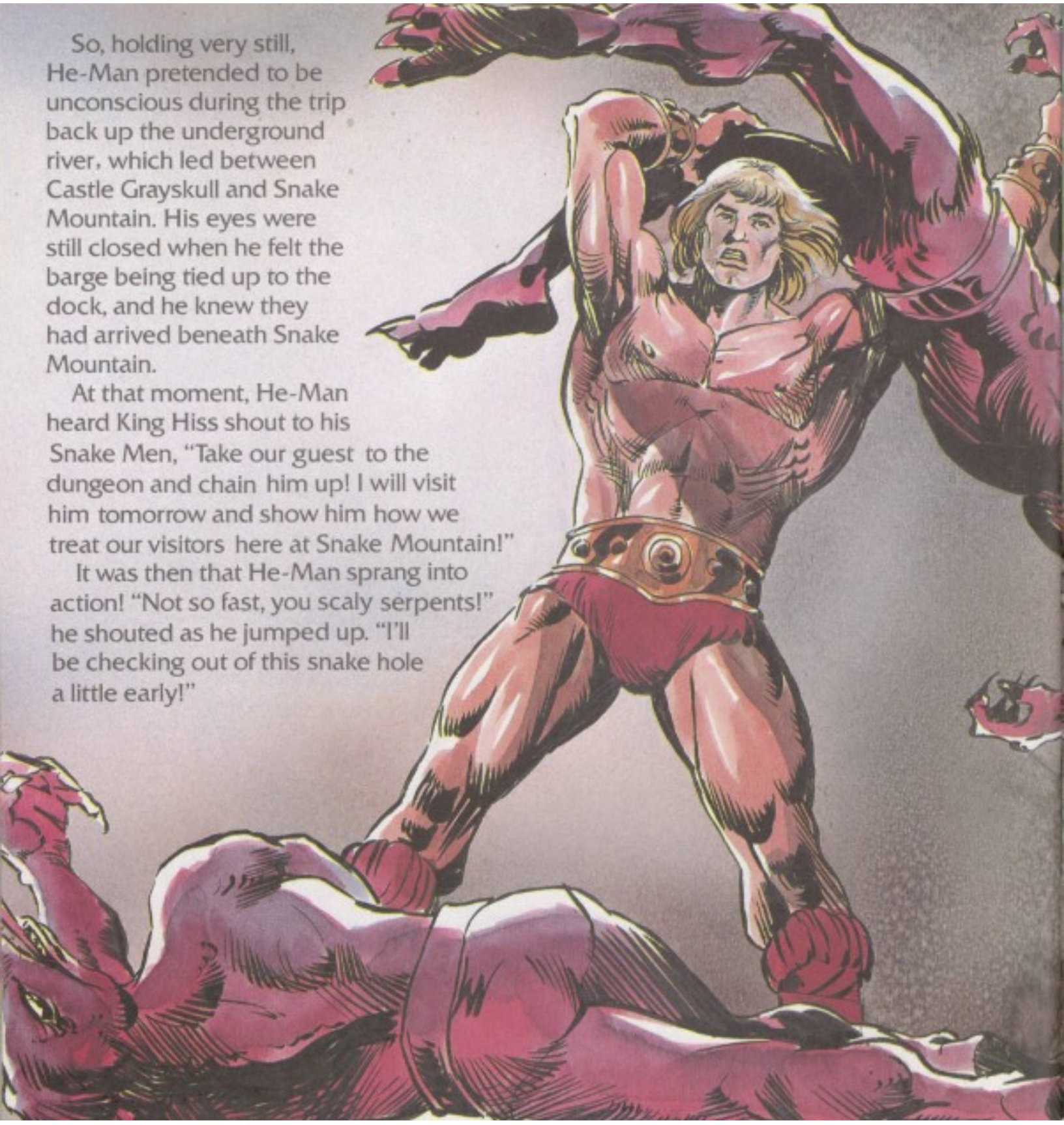


Although He-Man's eyes were open, he was helplessly paralyzed and could not move or speak. But his brain was still functioning as he thought, "I...I...can't let them take me to Snake Mountain. I've got to fight their poison and get my strength back."

But it was no use. King Hiss's poison was too powerful. For now, He-Man was a helpless prisoner. Rattlor and Tung Lashor carried He-Man to the barge and tied him up. Then they set sail for Snake Mountain with their prisoner.

King Hiss taunted He-Man, saying, "Where is your power now, mighty He-Man? Gone! Now I have the power, all the power! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

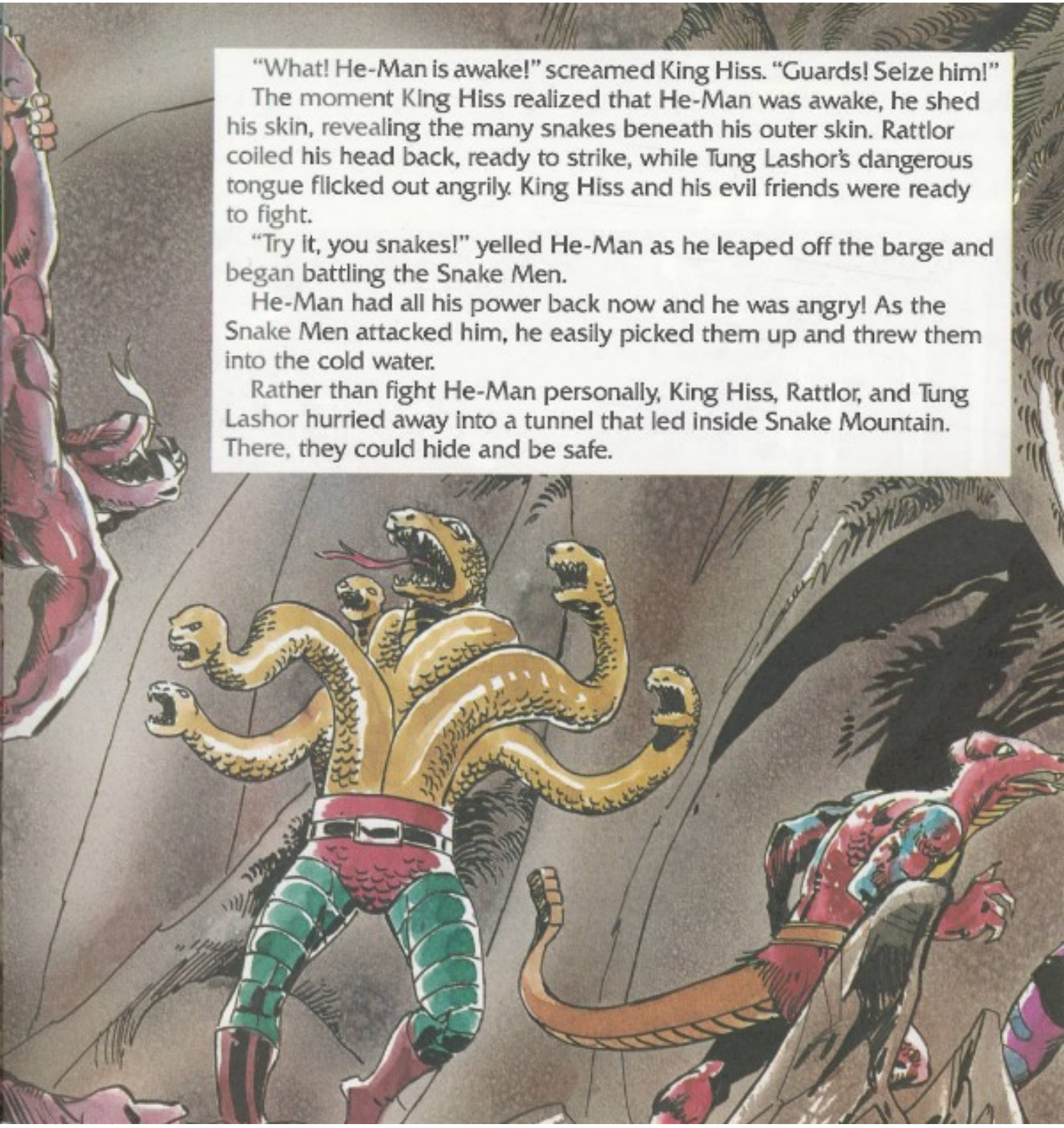
But even as he spoke, King Hiss was making a terrible mistake. He was underestimating He-Man's power. Already, He-Man could feel the effects of the venom poison starting to wear off, and he thought to himself, "I'll pretend to still be under the poison's effect. It will take several hours to reach Snake Mountain. By then, I should be wide awake and have all my strength back. Old Fang Face and his friends will be really surprised when I make my move."



So, holding very still, He-Man pretended to be unconscious during the trip back up the underground river, which led between Castle Grayskull and Snake Mountain. His eyes were still closed when he felt the barge being tied up to the dock, and he knew they had arrived beneath Snake Mountain.

At that moment, He-Man heard King Hiss shout to his Snake Men, "Take our guest to the dungeon and chain him up! I will visit him tomorrow and show him how we treat our visitors here at Snake Mountain!"

It was then that He-Man sprang into action! "Not so fast, you scaly serpents!" he shouted as he jumped up. "I'll be checking out of this snake hole a little early!"



"What! He-Man is awake!" screamed King Hiss. "Guards! Seize him!"

The moment King Hiss realized that He-Man was awake, he shed his skin, revealing the many snakes beneath his outer skin. Rattlor coiled his head back, ready to strike, while Tung Lashor's dangerous tongue flicked out angrily. King Hiss and his evil friends were ready to fight.

"Try it, you snakes!" yelled He-Man as he leaped off the barge and began battling the Snake Men.

He-Man had all his power back now and he was angry! As the Snake Men attacked him, he easily picked them up and threw them into the cold water.

Rather than fight He-Man personally, King Hiss, Rattlor, and Tung Lashor hurried away into a tunnel that led inside Snake Mountain. There, they could hide and be safe.

Once he had defeated the Snake Men, He-Man untied the barge and sailed away from Snake Mountain. As the barge drifted away from the mountain, He-Man gave a mighty yell. "AHHHHHHH!"

He-Man's shout was so loud, it caused a small earthquake. The stone walls of the river cave collapsed in a thunderous roar!

"That will seal up the cave forever," said He-Man as the barge floated away safely. "King Hiss and his Snake Men won't be using this cave for a long, long time. I should have never doubted my own feelings when I sensed danger. That's one mistake I won't make again."

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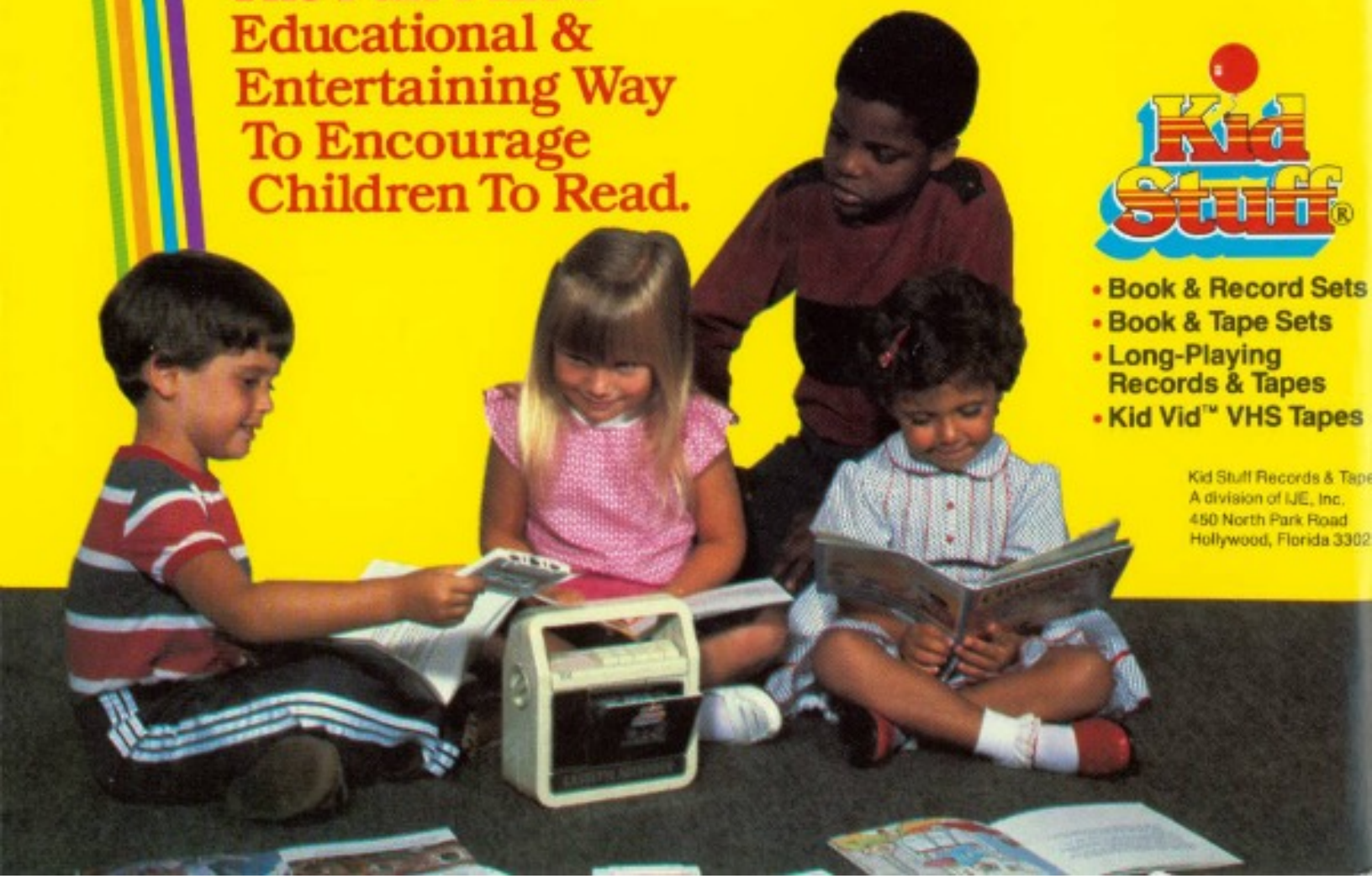

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